**Gamifying Zoo Experience**

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**Introduction:**

One of the most exciting ways to teach students is through informal education. Informal educational settings such as zoo, aquariums, and museums offer real life experiences that produce life long learning.

**Una de las más emocionantes maneras de enseñar a los alumnos es mediante la educación informal. Los entornos educativos informales como el zoo, acuarios y museos experiencias de la vida real de oferta que producen la vida aprendiendo.**

Kids are quickly and easily engaged when attending an informal educational program. First, it’s often something different from what they are doing day-to-day. Also, it is something they are most likely interested in from the start. I believe that through gamifying the experience and the use of badging we can make a typical trip to the zoo more exciting and more meaningful. There are currently many games out there that incorporate a zoo experience. My children play Zoo Tycoon on the computer. They can spend hours creating new zoos and taking care of the animals. The game offers opportunities to take pictures of the animals, as well as, opportunities to learn about the animals.

Now, what if those opportunities and more were brought with you when you visit the zoo as a family or as a class. There are already a few examples of this out there now. The Taronga Zoos in Australia have an iPhone app that uses GPS technology to take you on a tour of the zoo. While there, you can take a picture of the animals and put it directly into an animal manual.

**Ahora, qué pasa si esas oportunidades y más fueron llevados con usted cuando visite el zoológico como una familia o una clase. Ahora ya hay algunos ejemplos de esto por ahí. Los zoológicos de Taronga en Australia tienen una aplicación de iPhone que utiliza la tecnología GPS a dar un paseo por el zoológico. Una vez allí, puede tomar una foto de los animales y ponerlo directamente en un manual de animales.**

You can then look back on your trip and learn facts about the animals. As you fill up the animal manual with photos you take icons are changed. The Dallas Zoo also uses an app for Android and iPhones that uses the GPS technology and maps to give you a guided tour of the zoo. You learn different facts about the animals as you go around. There are also links on the app to special events and educational programs. These apps are focused on improving the overall experience of visiting the zoo. My thought is to make an app for those visiting the zoo that is focused on the educational experience.

**Lesson Plan:**

In order to gamify a zoo experience I would first set up a simple series of quests or a scavenger hunt to complete.

Examples:

· Take a digital picture of at least 3 animals

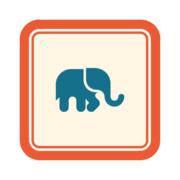
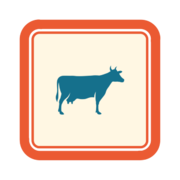
· Find at least 3 animals that are native to America

· Find at least 2 animals native to Africa

· Post at least 1 picture to Twitter with the hashtag #Schoolnamezootrip

· Find information using a smartphone about 1 animal in the zoo and post 2 facts into a class blog page.

Each task would have a badge attached to it for kids to earn. I’ve created some badges below that could be used.

Students can then take the information they have gathered digitally from their trip to the zoo and use to create learning experiences back in the classroom. I would give sharing choices such as a picture slide show, blog posts, or class presentation. Each type of sharing would come with a badge. This type of activity could be used throughout the year and be done at any informal educational opportunity. By giving students choices to achieve the badges they have the most interest in you are instantly engaging them into effective and positive learning experiences. They feel like they are in control of their learning.

Other learning quests that could be used:

* Conservation Information
* Forestry
* Mapping

**Conclusion:**

Informal education offers endless amounts of positive learning opportunities for students. By taking the visit a little further and give students the choice about what badges they want to earn, you are providing real life learning that will stay with them for life. The above example is just a simple one, but can be adjusted to be as complex as needed. I truly believe that self driven lessons can have a powerful impact on students. These type of activities can be applied to other forms of informal education such as museums and aquariums. There is definitely room for improvements to the apps currently available, but it’s exciting to see what the possibilities are. I would encourage any teacher or parent to try these type of activities when taking children to the zoo.

**Links to Zoo Apps Discussed:**

Taronaga Zoo

<http://taronga.org.au/taronga-zoo/activities/taronga-zoo-free-iphone-app>

Dallas Zoo

<http://www.dallaszoo.com/plan-your-adventure/dallas-zoo-iphone-app/>